

Astoria Column

# Monumental Restoration

*The history and restoration  
of the Astoria Column*



This publication was produced from articles and photos reprinted from The Daily Astorian newspaper. Brian J. McNeill, The Daily Astorian features editor, designed and edited *Monumental Restoration*. Writers Catherine Hawley, Rachel Wecker, Jennifer Nardini, Cathy Peterson and Allison Arthur contributed articles; Karl Maasdam, Andy Dolan and Jeffrey Foster contributed the photography.

Entire contents © Copyright, 1995  
by The Daily Astorian



**T**he Columbia River Historical Expedition turns east this afternoon, leaving Oregon and the Last West behind it.

Its major objective accomplished this morning in the dedication of the Astoria Column, the homeward trip will be given over more largely to recreation.

The last feature of the Clatsop County's program of entertainment for the expedition came at noon today after the conclusion of the dedicatory services, when a baked salmon dinner was served to the 150 members of the expedition and the Astoria committees as well on the summit of Coxcomb Hill just below the speakers platform.

Following the luncheon, the expedition members fraternized with the Astorians before moving to the special trains at the Astoria depot, from where the expedition leaves this afternoon for Longview on its return trip.

The entire arrival, reception and entertainment of the expedition party went smoothly as planned by the Astoria committees.

The traffic situation on the hill was well handled by courteous officers, there being no material confusion or serious congestion.

The dedicatory ceremonies were presided over by Walter M. Pierce, governor of the state of Oregon. The Rev. E.A. Gottberg, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Astoria, delivered the invocation, while the program was interspersed with selections by the Astoria band and a vocal chorus of 200 voices directed by H.P. Filer.

The assemblage on the hilltop was colorful and inspiring. Thousands of men, women and children rode or climbed to the hilltop from which the monument rises as a shining shaft.

— Page 1 story from the Astoria Budget, July 22, 1926



# Behold the Column!

Few towns in America, much less Oregon or the Pacific Northwest, possess a symbol as vivid and widely recognized as the Astoria Column. Dedicated in 1926, the Column is a monument to the voyages and expeditions of discovery which came to this place on the globe. One of America's greatest historians, Samuel Eliot Morrison, delivered the dedicatory address, in which he referred to Astoria as "the Plymouth Rock of the West."

Thanks to the philanthropy of that era, the Column was raised.

Thanks to the philanthropy of our era, the Column has been restored.

The Column is more than a symbol. Generations of Oregon school children received a history lesson by walking around the perimeter of the summit of Coxcomb Hill.

The deterioration of the Column was quite understandable in our maritime climate. Fortunately, the process of decay was not allowed to continue. Astoria Mayor Edith Henningsgaard Miller made the Column's restoration a top priority, and her successor Willis Van Dusen maintained that urgency. The Friends of the Astoria Column conducted a dogged fund-raising campaign to

make this event a reality.

The challenge of restoring the Column should not be underestimated. For years the will to restore the Column was frustrated because there was no clear answer of how to go about the task. The science, craft and art behind final result are not easily discovered or executed.

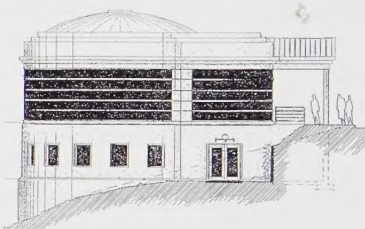
Sunday's celebration of the unveiling of the restored Column heralded a

new era for this community. The church bells and ship's horns pealed in celebration of a new spirit of cooperation and initiative that can take Astoria to new heights of accomplishment.

With that in mind,

we applaud the Friends of the Column for its plans to build an interpretive center at the summit of Coxcomb Hill. Interpretive centers are one of the best innovations in the last quarter century. They have brought our national parks and memorials to life for thousands of visitors. Astoria is behind the curve when it comes to making its history accessible to those who visit. In addition to interpreting the story of the Column, this center will prime the pump of a wellspring of Astoria history that begs for interpretation.

— Stephen A. Forrester, Editor  
*The Daily Astorian*, Nov. 20, 1995



*An artist's rendering of the Astoria Column Interpretive Center.*

# Contents

## History

A look at the Astoria Column from its conception to completion in 1926.

Page 4



## Fund-raising

Through the efforts of dedicated citizens, funds are gathered to restore the Column to its former glory.

Page 6



## Restoration

Decades of sun, wind and rain took their toll on the famous landmark. Meet the people who brought it back to life.

Page 14



## A new beginning

After years of fund-raising and restoration, the work of talented artists and craftsmen is unveiled.

Page 38





*Workers build the Astoria Column in 1926. The project cost \$32,500 to complete.*

# Birth of a Column

Calvin Coolidge was in the White House. Clara Bow graced the silver screen. Brave women bobbed their hair and brazen women wore trousers.

Headlines carried the latest news of Aimee Semple MacPherson, a hugely popular evangelist who disappeared from a California beach and was believed drowned until she popped up months later in Mexico, claiming she was kidnapped.

In Astoria, a new Piggly Wiggly

grocery store opened on 32nd and Franklin streets, the Oregon Coast Artillery at Fort Stevens suffered an outbreak of smallpox, and famous Hollywood director Cecil B. DeMille announced he would film his new movie, "The Yankee Clipper," at the mouth of the Columbia River.

And for the annual Founders Day celebration in July, two trains carrying a "world notables" on a cross-country tour arrived to help



dedicate the new Astoria Column on Coxcomb Hill.

Leader of the historians, artists, writers and businessmen of the Columbia River Historical Expedition was Ralph Budd, president of the Great Northern Railroad, which was helping to pay for the monument commemorating settlement of the West.

Unfortunately, the mural winding around the column was not quite done for this occasion, though Italian artist Attilio Pusterla pushed himself as much as humanly possible. The sgraffito technique he was using to depict the history of the North Coast, from the exploration of Capt. Robert Gray to the arrival of the railroad,

was time-consuming and would take a couple more months to finish.

Despite that hitch, a crowd of thousands assembled for the noon ceremony in cool weather under cloudy skies. They listened to speeches recounting the story of Lewis and Clark and comparing Astoria to New England's Plymouth Rock. Mrs. Richard Aldrich, a descendent of John Jacob Astor, spoke, and President Coolidge's secretary of state sent a congratulatory message.

Afterward, members of the expedition were treated to a baked salmon dinner and "fraternized with Astorians" before they boarded the train to Longview to dedicate a new bridge over the Cowlitz River.

## *Depiction of the paintings*

*The history of the Pacific Northwest is depicted in 14 scenes surrounding the Astoria Column. The scenes are as follows, from bottom:*

1. Native wilderness. 2. Discovery of the Columbia River by Captain Robert Gray in the ship Columbia, 1792. 3. American Indian village in land now known as Astoria. 4. Lewis & Clark Expedition, 1805. 5. Lewis & Clark Expedition boiling sea water to make salt. 6. Lewis & Clark Expedition spends winter of 1805-1806 on the Lewis & Clark River. 7. Lewis & Clark Expedition builds Fort Clatsop. 8. John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company ship, Tonquin, sails from New York. 9. Tonquin arrives in Astoria, 1811. Building Fort Astoria. 10. Pacific Fur Company overland party arrives in Astoria, 1812. 11. Tonquin blown up at Vancouver Island, 1811. 12. Fort Astoria sold to the British and renamed Fort George, 1815. 13. Fort Astoria returned to the United States, 1818. 14. The coming of settlers and the railroad.



KARL MAASDAM

## Constructing little columns

*Leah Golden-Sea, a fourth-grader at Astor Elementary School, glues her cardboard Astoria Column bank together in October 1993. The banks will be used by about 2,000 Astoria schoolchildren to collect money for the Friends of Astoria Column group. The organization is raising money to restore and maintain the Column and to build an interpretive center.*

*Meanwhile, the Step On It! campaign has raised about \$45,000 toward the restoration, according to organizers. Each of the Column's 164 inside steps is being sold to sponsors for \$1,000. A plaque commemorating the sponsors will be placed near the Column.*

*Recent visitors to the Column might have noticed scaffolding near the structure. Restoration specialists will be painting test sections of the column this fall.*



## Column donors pledge \$41,000

Fund-raisers for the Astoria Column hit the ground running this week as organizers began their "Step on It" campaign.

Sponsors pledged \$41,000 toward the restoration of the column during a Monday night banquet at the Astoria Golf & Country Club. The dinner came at the end of a golf tournament that also raised money for the restoration and new visitor's center. The tournament brought in \$1,500.

Each of the Column's 164 inside steps is being sold symbolically for \$1,000. The names of the step's sponsors will be displayed on a plaque somewhere near the column.

Jordan Schnitzer, the president of the Friends of the Astoria Column, told the dinner gathering that the

restoration is estimated to cost between \$400,000 and \$500,000. An one-story interpretive center planned for the site will cost about \$1 million.

Proceeds from the \$164,000 fund-raising campaign will be used to match a \$250,000 Meyer Memorial

Trust grant designated for the project, Schnitzer said.

Portland philanthropist and businesswoman Arlene Schnitzer bought several steps, including one for her son, Jordan.

---

*'I can't tell you how impressed I am with this community.'*

— Arlene Schnitzer

Portland philanthropist

---

"I can't tell you how impressed I am with this community," she said at the dinner.

The Schnitzer family traces its commercial roots to Astoria. Jordan Schnitzer's grandfather, Samuel Schnitzer, ran a scrap business in Astoria in the early 1900s.

## *Preservationists say restoration could begin by next spring*

Restoration and conservation work on the Astoria Column could begin as soon as next spring.

Dr. Frank Preusser, the technical advisor and coordinator for the structure's restoration, said

Thursday that he and members of the Friends of the Astoria Column are considering a March start if the group raises enough money. The work is estimated to cost \$500,000.

So far about \$50,000 has been raised and there are commitments of matching grants for thousands of dollars more.

The March starting date is several years earlier than the group had planned, he said. In the meantime, a test section has been set up on the Column for public viewing. Conservator Jonathan Taggart has been cleaning and treating the test sections of the Column for several weeks.

Preusser and Taggart updated members of the Astoria City Council on their work. Preusser will offer a public presentation on the Column restoration Sunday as well as a slide show including some of his other restoration efforts.

Preusser, who has a doctorate in physical chemistry and chemical technology from Munich's Technical University, is the author of more than three dozen papers that apply his academic disciplines to historic preservation. He has worked on monuments in Europe, Latin America and the Asia. Preusser was also involved in restoration work on the Egyptian Sphinx. He will produce the restoration plan for the Column while Taggart will direct and perform the conservation.

Taggart brought several old photographs of the Astoria Column to

the Thursday meeting, including one of the column taken shortly after it was built in 1926 and one of the column taken after a "face-lift" in 1936. The column was built by Italian artist Attilio Pusterla as a gift to the city from The Great Northern Railroad and Vincent Astor, heir to the trading company that founded Astoria in 1811.

Taggart also displayed a replica panel from the column that he has created. He has treated the panel with chemicals and paints to test which methods and mixtures will restore and preserve the column.



*Attilio Pusterla —  
Italian artist who built  
the Astoria Column*

With proper restoration, Preusser said the Column would not need another overhaul for 50 years. The Friends of the Astoria Column has discussed raising money to set up a maintenance trust for the structure, Preusser said.

The preservationists also told the City Council that they are considering adding another conservator to the project and finding students of preservation who might want to intern on the project. The staffing should not cost more because the work could be completed earlier, Preusser said.

## Column effort goes to banks

Astoria Column fund-raisers have taken their "Step on It" campaign to Astoria banks.

That's right. Six-foot-tall signs with the names of the people who have given money are being placed in area banks, says Fred Lindstrom, director of the Astoria Parks & Recreation Department. In addition to the signs, postcards will be available for people who want more

information about the Friends of the Astoria Column's Step on It campaign.

About 74 of the column's 164 inside steps have been symbolically purchased for \$1,000 each, Lindstrom says. The money will go toward the restoration of the column and the addition of a visitor's center.

The restoration is estimated to cost about \$500,000 while the visitor's center will cost about \$1 million.

"We feel the step program is very important to the fund-raising efforts," Lindstrom says.

September 1994

## Fund-raisers closing in on goal

Astoria Column fund-raisers are within \$100,000 of the amount they need to restore the mural on the Coxcomb Hill landmark.

City Parks Director Fred Lindstrom also announced Thursday that work will begin soon to prevent future "crumbling" of the decorative frieze that traces the area's history from the arrival of white man to the development of the railroad.

Restoration of the mural is estimated to cost \$500,000, while a new visitor's center at the park will cost about \$1 million.

People can also get an idea of what the restored column will look like. A small section on the lowest panel of the mural on the east side of the tower

has been cleaned and redone with Keim paint.

Lindstrom said the goal is to have the entire project completed next summer.

Italian artist Attilio Pusterla made the original mural using a method called sgraffito, in which layers of pigmented cement are applied and then scraped to create the design. But since completion in 1926 of the monument, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, the artwork has deteriorated and faded from rain and winter winds. In fact, Pusterla had to touch up the mural in 1936.

The sgraffito technique apparently died with Pusterla.



## Fred Lindstrom

# Column advocate dies at 47

Astoria lost a champion for kids and parks Monday when longtime Astoria Parks & Recreation Director Fred Lindstrom died.

Lindstrom, 47, died of natural causes, according to a spokesman for Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary. Services are pending.

He leaves behind his wife, Carol, and the couple's young son, Andrew. Lindstrom's parents, Carl and Margaret, as well as numerous siblings and other relatives, also survive.

Mayor Willis Van Dusen has postponed until Monday, Nov. 28, an Astoria City Council meeting scheduled for tonight. Van Dusen said this morning that news of Lindstrom's death stunned city officials and the community, many of whom had visited with Lindstrom recently.

Lindstrom, who worked for the city for 21 years, had missed his first League of Oregon Cities annual meeting last weekend, Van Dusen said.

"He wasn't there because he wasn't feeling well," the mayor said. "Fred had made every one. His absence was obvious."

Van Dusen praised Lindstrom for his tireless efforts to better recreation opportunities in the community. Not only did the director oversee all of Astoria's parks and many public

spaces, Lindstrom joined in on several intramural sports teams. People will remember Lindstrom's skill on the basketball court, Van Dusen said, adding that the park director played basketball for the University of Oregon his freshman year.

"Fred did not direct the parks & recreation department from his office," Van Dusen said. "He participated."

The mayor said he had known Lindstrom since they were children. Lindstrom's family are longtime members of St. Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Church. Lindstrom attended the Star of Sea School and was elected student body president his senior year, Van Dusen said.

Co-workers described Lindstrom as a person who "worked endlessly to do good."

Jim Krettler, the parks department recreation supervisor who has worked for Lindstrom for 14 years, called his former boss "dedicated."

"He was dedicated to the city and the people beyond what people really knew," Krettler said. "He was a very private person. He did things behind the scene. He didn't like to be out in front."

Added City Manager Bob DeLong: "You can't go anywhere in this community without running into one of Fred's accomplishments. I'm

going to miss him an awful lot.”

DeLong and others credited Lindstrom with developing soccer and football fields at the Astoria Middle School, getting the Maritime Memorial going and helping to build pocket parks along the waterfront and throughout the community.

Lindstrom also ran the city’s summer recreation and kids’ education program, oversaw operations at Tapiola Pool and the Ocean View Cemetery and threw his energy behind community recreation projects. He helped develop a system of urban trails and studied the possibility of an indoor pool.

His efforts often went beyond a written job description, DeLong said, noting Lindstrom’s work on restoring the Astoria Column and his participation in Clatsop County sesquicentennial activities.

Michael Foster, Astoria High School librarian, worked closely

with Lindstrom on restoration plans for the column.

“Fred felt that the column was such an essential part of Astoria,” Foster said. “His work was unceasing.”

Former City Manager Dale Curry hired Lindstrom in 1973. Shaken by the news of Lindstrom’s death, Curry said this morning he was “so sad.”

“The city has lost more than just an employee,” he said. “They lost someone who was really conscientious and loyal. All of the parks we had were built while Fred was there. He basically did most of the work.”

Curry said Lindstrom’s style was one of persistence.

“He would keep plugging away at something,” Curry said. “He was always thinking about how he could do it to make it better. Sometimes when I would try to pull the rein backs he would try to go, go, go. And that was good.”

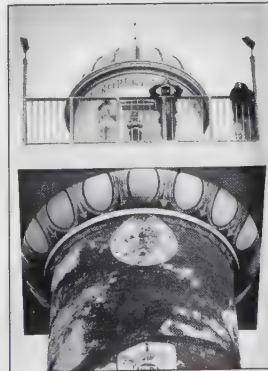
March 1995

## Column work set to begin in May

*Restoration work will  
close the monument  
for the summer*

The scaffolding will go up on the Astoria Column in May as an extensive restoration project gets under way.

That means the interior of the structure will be closed to visitors from May until fall while conserva-



*Visitors  
scan the  
view from  
the top  
of the  
Column.*

tors re-paint the pictures and caricatures on the Column's exterior. However, it will also be an opportunity to see world-class preservationists at work on a historic structure, Friends of Astoria Column President Jordan Schnitzer told a gathering in Astoria Tuesday.

Plus, there's also talk that the column could be opened up once a month for tours and presentations about the preservation.

The Column's restoration cost should come to about \$500,000, Schnitzer said. About \$180,000 of

that came from the local "Step On It" fund-raising campaign where sponsors could symbolically purchase one of the Column's 164 interior steps.

The group has a pledge from the the city government in Walldorf, Germany to pay \$10,000 for one of the two final steps. They are waiting to hear from the English relatives of John Jacob Astor to see if the descendants will pay \$10,000 for the other stair.

Schnitzer credited the local support with helping to get grants to pay for the restoration. So far, Column supporters have received grants from the Collins Foundation, the Autzen Foundation and other charitable groups.

Also in the works is an effort to get

national historic landmark status for the Column, which was constructed in 1926 and decorated by Italian artist Attilio Pusterla.

Thane Tienson, a member of the Friends of Astoria Column, said Oregon Sen. Mark O. Hatfield would

help support such a nomination.

The designation could mean more grants for the structure's care.

"It's quite apparent the Column should qualify," Tienson said. "All signs are very positive for it to be a national historic landmark."

---

*'It's quite apparent the Column should qualify. All signs are very positive for it to be a national historic landmark.'*

**—Thane Tienson**

member, Friends of  
Astoria Column

---

Frank Preusser, a Los Angeles preservation expert with international experience, told the gathering that a 10- to 12-member team of conservators, muralists and interns would be working on the structure. Astoria resident Jonathan Taggart will be the on-site conservator and responsible for day-to-day work.

Los Angeles consultant Claire Dean will be the project's archivist and Chicago muralist Thomas Melvin will train the team to use the restoration materials. A group of preservation graduate students will intern on the project, Preusser said.

The preservationists will start on the band of lettering, then move to the background images such as the sky, figures and the river. The structure



will be covered by a contained scaffolding and considered to be a "hard-hat" area, Preusser said.

A newsletter is planned to update

the public about the Column restoration's progress. A tentative groundbreaking ceremony has been discussed for late April.

May 1995

## *Scaffolds to the sky*

*Workers build up scaffolding around the Astoria Column Monday afternoon. Work on the scaffolding began May 9, and is expected to be finished in two or three days. The Column will then be wrapped in plastic to keep it dry while the restoration work is done. The Column is closed to the public until late October when the project is expected to be completed.*

KARL MAASDAM





JEFFREY FOSTER

*Scott Nolley, an intern working on the Column restoration project, carefully repaints the lettering that had faded over the years.*

## *Interns grab hold of Column restoration*

**By RACHEL WECKER**

Working on the Astoria Column restoration project is a hands-on experience. Four interns are part of the crew up on scaffolding this summer lending their hands to the job. They bring with them experience from other projects, but have found that nothing quite compares to being 125-feet high while restoring a historic document and work of art.

It's not very often that you get to work on something this size," said Jodie Utter, an intern who will be

entering the University of Delaware/Winterthur art conservation program this fall. "I was struck by the size."

The interns are students from graduate art conservation training programs in the United States and Canada. They spend two years in studies and two summers in internships. They spend their third year in a longer internship. The programs are very competitive, admitting a maximum of 10 students each a year.

The interns are a few of the privi-

leged people with the opportunity to work from the same vantage point of the artist. They see firsthand the artistic skill that went into the sgraffitto decoration.

"You get to sit in the position of the maker, see him thinking," said Scott Nolley, a second-year student at Buffalo State College in New York. "You get back with the artist."

From the scaffolding the three-quarter size designs are evident even where the paint has worn away. Images are visible to the interns that are not visible from the ground.

"You get a sense of the (artist) and time period," said Marie Laibinis-Craft, a second-year student at the Winterthur program who finds this work personally fulfilling as well. "It brings you more in tune with your culture."

The team is working with a monument that has been subjected to extreme weather conditions, a restoration and several attempts to clean and preserve it. While they restore what has worn away they are also preserving what is left of the original artwork.

"Preserving what's there. . . adds (a) challenge," said Laibinis-Craft.

Inpainting, the process of replacing the missing paint and leaving the

original paint visible, is a painstaking process. The crew is working with the original color from 1926 as well as the color used in the 1936 restoration. In certain places only a small dot of paint may be needed.

Although the interns are bringing experience from other projects and their backgrounds in chemistry, art history and studio art, they have a lot to learn on the job.

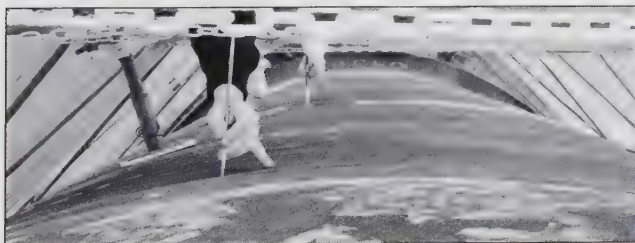
"I am learning the exact materials," said Laibinis-Craft, who has a degree in sculpture and chemistry. They are using unusual materials for long-term curability, including a silica-based consolidant that will restore strength to the weakened sand and mortar structure. The crew has been trained in the use of the materials and nature of the project.

They also recognize the significance of the restoration for the community.

"It is important because it is visible from everywhere," said Nolley.

Utter pointed out that there are a lot people do not know about the column from the ground. Filling it with color will make the information "pop out."

Susan Peschken, a student at the University of Queens in Ontario, Canada, is arriving next week.



*Interns work on different levels of scaffolding surrounding the Column.*

JEFFREY FOSTER



# Group climbs funding ladder

By **RACHEL WECKER**

**R**unners, golfers, climbers and kids have had a part in restoration of the Astoria Column.

The Friends of Astoria Column, a nonprofit citizen group dedicated to the restoration and maintenance of the Column, has engaged supporters in their fund-raising efforts from as far away as Germany and as close to home as local school children.

The Column, which cost descendants of John Jacob Astor and the Great Northern Railroad \$27,134 to build and decorate in 1926, is undergoing a \$700,000 restoration. The Friends organized fund-raising

events, received grants and generated enough donations to restore the 125-foot monument standing at the top of Coxcomb Hill.

Since 1988, the group has been raising money and planning for the restoration. It began with a \$500,000 budget, which has since increased with the addition of landscaping plans and other expenses. The group is working on raising the final \$40,000, some of which will come from Column concession sales and upcoming events, according to Ruth Shaner, Friends treasurer.

"Money is hard to raise," said Shaner, noting the effort the Friends



JEFFREY FOSTER

*Souvenirs of the Astoria Column include chocolate bars, coin banks, mugs, buttons, T-shirts, hats, coffee and beach towels. Sales of all items benefit restoration of the Column.*

has put into the restoration. "We want to see that the money is best spent."

Spending money comes easily in a project of this caliber.

More than \$250,000 is allotted for consulting and personnel fees. Materials, equipment, scaffolding and travel expenses are budgeted for about \$145,000. An \$80,000 budget has been established to design and restore the landscape, although that will come later. Not to mention the \$158,000 that has already been spent on the project.

The Friends has found plenty of ways to draw support and raise money. Their largest event has been the Step On It! campaign through which they symbolically sold 162 of the Column's 164 steps for \$1,000 each. In addition, the first step was sold to the city of Walldorf, Germany for \$10,000. The group hopes Lord Astor, a descendent of the Astors who paid for part of the Column, will purchase the last step for \$10,000. The names of the step's sponsors will be displayed on a plaque near the Column. This campaign has been so popular that many former Astorians are on a waiting list to purchase steps.

"The real heroes are the step buyers," said Shaner, emphasizing community interest and support as their No. 1 priority. "Astorians are typically pretty close with their money. They don't give frivolously."

Step On It! helped bring outside support to the restoration, as well. Most foundations want to see a solid

local commitment to the project and a large budget before they provide grants. This campaign showed just how much of the support was local.

Other fund-raisers include the Column Classic Golf Tournament and dinner; a dinner theater; Cocktails for the Column in Portland; the Astoria Column Restoration Run/Walk; and Coins for the Column which enlisted the help of 2,000 area schoolchildren who assembled cardboard "Column" banks to collect money for the restoration. More events, including another run, are still to come.

Grants totaling more than \$400,000 were received from the City of Astoria, Lord Astor, Collins Foundation, Autzen Foundation, Oregon Community Foundation, Rose Tucker Charitable Trust, Jackson Foundation, Templeton Foundation, Samuel S. Johnson Foundation and Clark Foundation. The Fred Meyer Foundation recently gave \$250,000 toward the project.

Currently, the Friends is seeking National Historic Landmark status for the Column. They are working with legislators to have this approved by Congress. If the Column receives this status it will be eligible for more grants, including money from the Getty Foundation.

The Friends will continue efforts until an endowment fund to support future maintenance of the column has been established. Members expect to carry the project far enough to have a source of income for the Column's upkeep.

Souvenirs also help fund the restoration project.

Chocolate columns, which sell for \$1.50, are just one of the souvenirs that benefit and promote the restoration. The group has a variety of souvenirs available for sale at many places in Astoria and someone can usually be found selling souvenirs at a booth at many of the festivals in

the area.

A good place to find mementos is at the booth at the base of the Column. Snacks are sold along with the souvenirs and information about the Column is available.

Some of the other Astoria Column mementos include column mugs, clothing, miniature handmade clay columns, postcards and hats.

July 1995



KARL MAASDAM

## Column celebrated under wraps

**C**louds surrounded the Astoria Column 69 years ago when it was first dedicated. Plastic will hide it when the Friends of Astoria Column celebrate its renovation.

What should be clear to onlookers is how community support is helping

to restore what the Friends see as community and national treasure.

What also should be clear – the National Weather Service is calling for only partly cloudy skies – is a panorama view of the Columbia River, Youngs Bay, the southwest



edge of Washington and miles and miles of the Coast Range.

When it was dedicated 69 years ago on July 22, a light mist had fallen the evening before and the view from Coxcomb Hill was restricted by clouds, according to The Astoria Evening Budget.

Nevertheless, the editor of The Astoria Evening Budget waxed on about the view from The Column in an editorial Thursday, July 22, 1926:

“Travelers have decided that nowhere on earth is a more splendid panorama afforded within city limits of a municipality than from Coxcomb Hill – and now the monument has added much to the glories offered to the eye, for the prospect from its peak exceeds that from its base.”

Participants in Saturday’s community celebration will not be able to venture to the top of the Column. It’s still closed off. And they will not be able to see how the Column is being transformed from a chocolate-colored shaft into a monument that vividly – through paintings by artist Attilio Pusterla – tells the story of how the West was discovered and settled.

But they will be able to partake in a “Column” cake and savor the success of progress, says Gail Dundas, a member of the Friends.

The celebration starts at 1 p.m. at the Column. Since parking is limited, organizers have arranged for a free shuttle service from the parking lot of Clatsop Community College to the Column. The service starts at noon and the shuttle will depart every 10 minutes from noon until 3 p.m.

Astoria City Councilor Susan Borgardt and Jordon Schnitzer, president of the Friends, will preside over the celebration. After their speeches, those who symbolically purchased a step for \$1,000 in the “Step On It” campaign will be asked to share their feelings about what their donation means to them.

The people who are working on the Column also will be introduced and participants will be able to talk to them about their work.

The celebration also kicks off another fund drive. This time bricks, not steps, will be for sale. The bricks will have the names of the donors inscribed on them and they will be used in the landscaping. The steps sold for \$1,000 each; the bricks are priced at \$30 each.

Back in 1926 when the Column was dedicated, dignitaries traveled from afar for the event. Organizers expect a similar event to occur when the \$700,000 renovation project is completed in early November.

The Astoria Column was built by the Great Northern Railroad and paid for by the railroad and descendants of Astoria’s namesake, John Jacob Astor.

It is modeled after the Trajan Column, which was erected in Rome by Emperor Trajan in 114 A.D. The 125-foot-tall monolith, the only one of its kind in the world, has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1974.

Weather has taken a toll on the Column over the years, prompting the renovation project.



# Column Facts

Built: Comp  
Height: 125  
Architect: E  
Idea Concei  
Paid For By



### Historical Information

Completed in 1926. Dedicated July 22, 1926.

155 feet; 164 steps. Cost: \$32,000.

Designed by Electus Litchfield of New York. Artist: Attilio Pusterla of Italy.

Gifted By: Ralph Budd, president of the Great Northern Railroad.

For: Great Northern Railroad and descendants of John Jacob Astor.



# A Column commander of uncommon caliber

By ALLISON ARTHUR

The Astoria Column is getting the same determined attention that Frank Preusser has shown other treasures of the world. Like the sphinx. The Gettysburg Address. The Dead Sea Scrolls. And Queen

Nefertari's tomb.

The 51-year-old German-born chemist -cum- conservator has worked all over the world. He's studied an ancient city in Cambodia as well as one in

Pakistan. He's worked with aborigines in Australia. And he's been the senior conservation specialist for the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Shyly, he will admit that he is still known as one of the world's foremost technical authorities on the Old World painting masters.

So what's a scientist of Preusser's caliber doing with a monument in Astoria's backyard?

Preusser finds the Astoria Column to be a wonder in its own right.

Built in 1926 by the Great Northern Railroad, the 125-foot-tall Astoria Column was designed as a

final monument along the route of the Great Northern Railway.

The monolith, constructed of reinforced concrete and decorated with a spiral pictorial frieze, traces the story of the discovery of Oregon country from before the advent of whites to the arrival of settlers and civilization.

It was designed by New York architect Electus D. Litchfield and decorated by the Italian-born artist Attilio Pusterla.

---

*'It has its own strengths ... you have something here no one else has.'*

— Frank Preusser

technical director, Column restoration

---

Oregon storms took a toll on the Column over the years and Pusterla returned in 1936 to repaint part of it.

The repainting did not last and in the late 1980s, a group of concerned residents organized Friends of the Astoria Column to fund restoration work.

The \$700,000 project started in June and is expected to be completed in November.

Preusser bristles at the seemingly common held opinion that the Column is of lesser value than any of the works of art he's been summoned to help preserve.

"It has its own strengths... You have something unique here no one else has," says Preusser, who is technical director of work on the Column.

"It's an important monument. It's the youngest I'm working on. Built in 1926, that's only 70 years ago. But it's a very important monument. "

Preusser didn't have ambitions of traveling the world to pore over the chemical properties of old artifacts.

As a child growing up in Munich, Germany, Preusser wanted to be a railroad conductor. After receiving his doctorate in chemistry from Technical University in Munich, he began looking around for something to do before diving into the doldrums of industry. He stumbled upon the Bavarian State Painting Galleries in Munich.

"I asked what they were doing ... and they said they are studying old paintings. I ... decided it might be nice to do something like that for a year and went in and applied for the job and got it. And sort of got stuck in it."

What he found so fascinating about conservation was not just the paintings and monuments he studied but the camaraderie and teamwork it took to preserve them.

"It is the most exciting part to work ... I've worked with archeologists in Greece. I've worked with architects in urban settings and with art historians in museums. You meet a complete set of different people than you would ever meet at Dow (Chemical)."

In 1982, based on research he had published, he was invited by the J. Paul Getty Museum in California to look at a collection of objects made of amber. Since paintings were his speciality, he also was asked to look at some paintings.

After a decade working as a civil servant in Munich, he opted to move to California to develop the scientific department for the Getty Conservation Institute. The museum takes care of its own collection while the institute was set up as a research institute to enhance conservation worldwide.

Through the institute, he was selected to participate in creating a conservation plan for the painted tomb of Queen Nefertari. He's been in Egypt at least 18 times.

He also was brought in to study the deterioration of the sphinx. Some theorized that groundwater was causing the sphinx, made of Egyptian limestone, to weaken. Preusser didn't subscribe to the theory. He noticed that in the early morning hours the sphinx was shrouded in fog and he suggested it might be moisture fluctuation that was the culprit. After much study, his theory was proved correct.

The column, he says, is a technical challenge that piques his curiosity more than say the Dead Sea Scrolls.

"It's unique in that we do not have any precedents to follow. We cannot go into literature and say 'Who else has done restoration like this?' because there is no large-scale sgraffito work in the world. There are sgraf-

fito works in Europe, but they are all small.

"The climate also makes it challenging. It's very hard to do a restoration in that time frame (between June and November) with the expectation of a long survival. We have to think a lot about that," he says in a blend of accents that reveal his fluency in German, French and English.

Work being done now on the 125-foot-tall work of art should last a generation – 50 years at least – and that means the paints being used, the techniques being used, must weather harsh winters and hot summers well into the next century.

Without being restored, the Column, like many other wonders of the world, could be lost. And really, that's why Preusser took on the job.

**I**n some ways, Preusser is a little like the Column. Unique. Certainly one of a few. In the United States, he estimates he's one of roughly 50 or so scientists who can call conservation a full-time occupation.

It is an occupation that has taught him much — about history, about art, about culture, and about people.

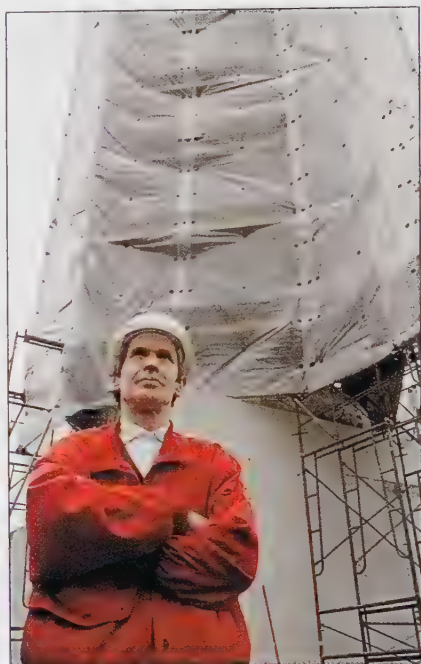
"People are basically the same everywhere. They are normally, generally peaceful and they have the same goals wherever you go. They want to improve their living conditions, create a better future for their children."

Over the years, he also has learned to respect cultural differences.

"Conservation, for a long time, was dominated by a European view

of what conservation is and how conservation should be done and what should be preserved. ... It really didn't take into consideration local differences and local sensitivities.

Preusser had been indoctrinated, as he terms it, by Western philosophy, which holds that the cultural heritage of all countries belongs to the whole



KARL MAASDAM

*Frank Preusser, technical director of restoration work on the Column, has worked all over the world*

world not just the individual country. It's a logic that had allowed conservators to impose their will on others.

"Countries, while still asking for foreign help, do not necessarily want to be dictated to about how to deal with their cultural heritage. It's good and fine if you want to see it, come



and see it, but it's our heritage and we'll decide how we want to deal with it," he says of how some countries view efforts by outsiders to preserve their monuments and works of art.

In fact, Preusser has changed the way he looks at antiquities.

In Cambodia, for example, the Angkor Temple District, which is larger than the Forbidden City in Beijing, was overgrown by jungle. Instead of being "preserved" for tourists to drive by and admire, it has been restored to be used.

"I found it rather refreshing that these monuments are being used again and not simply seen as a form of foreign currency by luring tourists to Cambodia," he says.

Another example of cultural difference was evident in Australia. Aborigines told him some items used in rituals need to be repainted every year. That goes against the grain of museum curators, who want to preserve things, "stop time" as it were.

Some preservation transcends rivalries. For example, in Pakistan, where Preusser is on an international committee to preserve Moenjotaro, a 5,000-year-old city, he was impressed with the fact that the Muslim country was taking great pains to preserve its Buddhist temples.

"I would have expected that they would neglect the Buddhist temples. But they are saying 'It is part of our history, it is what we created in that period of time,'" he says.

Yet more and more, conservation-

ists today, bound by political realities, are being asked to perform what Preusser calls "cultural triage," deciding what should be saved.

In Third World countries, industries are encroaching on history, on monuments and art. When people must decide between feeding their children and the fate of a Medieval temple, the temple often loses.

Money constraints also force questions. At some point, he says, "you have to ask how many Roman bathhouses do we really need?"

"Ask me if there were 50 Astoria columns. You probably wouldn't waste money or time on just this one. But there aren't 50. There's just this one."

Today, Preusser owns his own company, Frank Preusser & Associates, based in Los Angeles. He can pick and choose projects. He's enjoyed working for the Library of Congress, which asked him to evaluate how best to preserve the Gettysburg Address.

To Preusser all projects are important. Different, but important.

"I find a genuine need for people to know where they come from, for people to look in the past to find and be proud of past achievement and have hope for the future. We are the transition between past and future. If we destroy the past, where do we come from? Where's our point of reference?"

Preusser is confident in the future of the Astoria Column.

"Once it's done, no one will ever ask again why we are restoring it."



JEFFREY FOSTER

*Jonathan Taggart, an art conservator who lives in Astoria, has traveled the world over to restore works of art.*

## Local conservator coaxes detail back to the Column

By ALLISON ARTHUR

Jonathan Taggart used to climb to the top of the Astoria Column just for the fun of it. Now he does it as a job. And that's fun, too.

"I tried to look at it and see what was going on. I tried to make some sense out of it. But the images were so deteriorated that they were unreadable," Taggart remembers of the Column.

Back in those days, Taggart was struggling to make a living as a potter, sculptor and wood worker in Seaside and Gearhart. He taught ceramics at Clatsop Community College and was chairman of the Seaside Arts Commission.

Today, Taggart, 42, is Astoria's

only local professional conservator working with a team of other skilled technicians to restore the Column.

When he was in Seaside, he remembers venturing to the top of the Column just to look out at the world around him.

It was a world of choices and one of the choices for Taggart was whether to labor to become a great artist or study to restore the work of great artists.

"I'm really a hands-on person. I really loved working with my hands, but I never felt that I was creative in terms of pushing the boundaries of art," he said. "My work was good, but not necessarily great," he concluded about his art. "So what can I

do with my skills that will benefit great artists?" he asked himself.

The burly, bearded craftsman already had a botany degree from Oregon State University. He decided to pair it with a master's of science in art conservation from the University of Delaware/Winterthur, one of only four major universities that offer such degrees in North America. Each program produces 10 graduates a year, he says.

Taggart's speciality is in conserving objects and outdoor sculpture. In essence, stuff like the Column.

Like conservation scientist Dr. Frank Preusser, who owns a conservation consulting company in Los Angeles, Taggart has traveled extensively. When he worked for Fine Objects Conservation Inc. in New York, he was dispatched to examine and help conserve objects in Toronto, Canada, Florence, Italy and Tel Aviv, Israel as well as in museums throughout the United States. He has jobs lined up well into 1997.

But for now, Taggart is focusing on the work of Italian-born artist Attilio Pusterla, who ventured to Astoria in 1926 to decorate the Column with a spiral pictorial frieze. The frieze traces the story of the discovery of Oregon country from before the advent of whites to the arrival of settlers and civilization.

"He's very good," Taggart says of Pusterla's work. "When you see the sgaffitto that remains in good condition, it is vigorously carved, beautifully painted. He had an excellent understanding of anatomy."

The best preserved work of Pusterla's is on the northeast side of the Column. It was least subjected to harsh weather. And with that side, conservators can do what they prefer doing. They can conserve the work with a minimal use of paint.

In other areas, areas that were repainted when Pusterla was summoned to fix his work on the Column in 1936, the original work was heavily painted over. In fact, the work from 1926 is so different than the work done in 1936 that some, including Taggart, question whether Pusterla really did that much in 1936. In those areas, conservators are striving to restore the original work, shining bright lights at an angle on the Column in an effort to find the original carved lines. That's harder and more painstaking.

For Taggart, the project is kind of an internship. Although he's worked on many other projects, none were quite as involved as the Column project.

"Working with a large team is a new experience for me. I am learning a lot, as is everyone on the team."

When he first came to Astoria in the early 90s, he recommended a plan of action to restore the Column. After Preusser became involved, Taggart began working with him.

Taggart did a test sample on the Column in 1993 using the techniques that were planned to restore the Column. The test panel was intended as a taste of what the Column would look like once



restored and therefore an incentive to help fund the project. It also was designed to test materials that would be used.

One of the problems identified back then was that the silicate-based paint dries two shades lighter than when applied. That meant those working on the project would need to learn how to mix the paint two shades darker.

"It is a difficult problem which

slows progress, though everyone on the scaffold seems to have mastered the technique."

One of the real problems for Taggart is that "we can't take a step back at look at what we're doing." The Column remains surrounded by scaffolding and plastic.

When the work is finished, Taggart will go back to simply enjoying the Column. And enjoying the work he did to restore it.

---

September 1995

---

*Claire Dean, site manager, examines a freshly painted part of the mural on the Astoria Column.*

KARL MAASDAM



## Just call the Column 'baby'

BY RACHEL WECKER

Claire Dean is used to working with pictographs and petroglyphs thousands of years old, but her project this summer – the Astoria Column restoration – is just a baby at 69 years old.

"The Column is an unusual project for me," said Dean, documentation

manager and site manager. "Most of my work is on archeological materials and sites."

Wearing a red hard hat and utility belt equipped with a cellular phone and pager, Dean is at the Column every day stripping old paint or inpainting a mountain or river or boat.

Built in 1926 by the Great Northern Railroad and paid for by the railroad and descendants of Astoria's namesake, John Jacob Astor, the column is the subject of a \$700,000 restoration requiring the expertise of several conservationists.

Dean's expertise is just what was needed. Working on rock art, her specialty, involves painted masonry that is outside and exposed to the weather, much like the column which is constructed of reinforced concrete and decorated with a spiral pictorial frieze. They face the same kinds of problems such as adhesion of paint, treatment and restoration processes.

So working on the Column is right up Dean's alley, even though her alley starts in England where she was born, raised and introduced into archeology.

When she was 6, her history teacher taught her class everything from dinosaurs to the Romans. An enthusiastic youngster, Dean went home and told her parents she was going to be an archeologist. When they realized she was serious, they found books for her to read and her interest stuck.

"I owe a lot to them because at that time there were no books for 6-, 8-, 10-year-olds on archeology," said Dean also emphasizing the influence teachers have on their students. "I went on my first excavation when I was 13."

Dean's interest in conservation developed as a teenager, but on the advice of a mentor, she earned her undergraduate degree in archeology

before getting a post-graduate diploma in archeological conservation, citing the importance of understanding what the objects are that she preserves.

Teaching jobs and research positions have led Dean to Cyprus and Turkey and brought her to the United States where she is working to bring conservationists out to archeological sites.

"In the U.S. archeological materials don't get conservation treatment until they are in museums and even then they get overlooked for fine art," Dean lamented, explaining that once an object is brought into daylight it goes into shock because it has become weak underground. "There is a need in the U.S. for education."

Dean's commitment led to the development of her business, Dean and Associates Conservation Services in Portland. She specializes in "providing conservation treatments and general consulting services with regard to archeological sites."

Dean has found a happy medium with her line of work. She has the opportunity to work on sites as a conservationist as well as work with the challenges of a growing field of work.

"It's exciting. Archeology is developing with new dating techniques," said Dean. "It's very active and a lot of fun."

To do her work with the ancient Dean finds new technology helpful. She is linked with conservationists through the Worldwide Web on a rock art page and uses on-line services for

weather forecasts and travel arrangements. She does not use a laptop computer anymore- she has a palm-top computer. That and smaller cameras make the long hikes to sites easier.

Primarily, Dean works with federal and state agencies like national parks where she faces nine out of 10 situations of vandalism or theft of rock art.

"It can be depressing because of the problems of vandalism and theft," she said, pointing out that it is a federal offense to remove artifacts from federal land. She travels all over the country to assess damage and rehabilitate sites or work on other projects like the column.

Not only does the damage affect the land, but it also impacts American Indians. Most of the sites that have fallen to the hands of vandals have religious significance to American Indians. When sites are vandalized, a religious place is desecrated, she said.

"It's like going up to the altar in a church and spray painting religious images," said Dean who consults the American Indian communities about treatments. "I have a great deal of respect for (American Indians). Many are actively trying to preserve and pass on (rock art) to their children.

"It is extremely satisfying if I can help them. It has led to close friendships with (American Indians)."

Dean's jobs lead her into strange and sometimes uncomfortable situations. She spent three days one January in a frozen cave in Wisconsin assessing some rock art damaged by

the flooding and freezing from the 1993 floods.

"I have never been so cold," she said with mock shivers.

And there was the time she was working in Coconino National Forest in Arizona when a group of people surrounded her for two hours receiving guidance from a man dressed as a leprechaun and channeling the spirit of a leprechaun.

"He was the spirit interpreting the meaning of the rock art," said Dean, who was ignored through the process. "He had the worst Irish accent."

Although the story sounds comical, Dean found it disturbing because what they were doing had nothing to do with the people who originally created the images. Sometimes events like this damage the sites.

"They are entitled to their beliefs, but they should hear the other side of the story," said Dean hoping the group understood the American Indian history.

While Dean's job may lead her into unusual circumstances it also takes her to places not open to the public where she can pitch a tent to do her work – something she does not take for granted.

But by far, the benefits of the job outweigh the long trips away from home or the challenge of running her business from the pay phone on top of Coxcomb Hill (Column location).

"The best thing is the people I get to meet and work with," she enthused. "They are remarkable people. Just about everyone is an inspiration."



# Despite covering, visitors keep coming

By RACHEL WECKER

“What are they doing to the Column? When is it going to be done? Why can’t we go up?” ask visitors to the Astoria Column.

There is no end to the questions they have about the Column restoration. They are curious about what is going on under the plastic-covered structure at the top of Coxcomb Hill. And when they find out, they are usually pleased with the project.

“It’s fascinating, although I can’t understand all of (the process),” said Ron and Linda Lunde, of Kennewick, Wash., who plan to come back when the restoration is complete. “It’s astounding what Friends of the Column have done.”

According to Sally Freeman, a ranger from Fort Clatsop National Memorial, people are really impressed with the restoration after they read the information board. (Friends of Astoria Column, a non-profit group dedicated to the restoration and maintenance of the column, gave Fort Clatsop a donation to have a ranger available at the Column four days a week through Labor Day.)

“Having the (National Parks Service) here is a plus,” said the Lundes who sought out a ranger for an explanation.

People who have visited the Column before usually understand the need for the restoration or are even pleasantly surprised to find out there is artwork on the column.

“People are taken by the fact that the project is going on,” said Scott Nolley, restoration intern. “They say, ‘I’m coming back (when the restoration is complete).’”

Even those who are aware the column is covered come anyway, he said.

Some visitors even have ideas on ways the Column can be viewed. Freeman said one man suggested putting the Column on a rotating disk to eliminate walking around it several times while following the story. Others think that the steps should spiral around the outside of the Column rather than the inside.

One man commented that he thought the restoration process was at least as interesting as the artwork itself.

Visitors also find out that their donations help support the restoration.

“People are surprised that this is a private restoration,” said Noreen Tierney, manager of the information and concessions booth at the base of the Column.

There are always a few people who are disappointed that they cannot see the Column or enjoy the view from the top like they had planned. A few need some convincing to get them to believe that the restoration is a good project.

“Some people are upset that it is covered,” said Scott Nolley. “There is a strong emotional attachment for some people.”

# Bringing the Column into focus

By **RACHEL WECKER**

For the three local conservators working on the Astoria Column restoration, the Column is like an old friend they have lost contact with over the years. Now they are rekindling their relationship by helping bring the Column to life again.

Rebecca Rubens, John Goodenberger and Aretta Christie mount the scaffolding each day to “work in the brushstrokes” of the original artist, Attilio Pusterla. Under the direction of Frank Preusser, they are part of an 11-person team restoring the sgraffito design depicting events from the coming of the white settler to the arrival of the Great Northern Railroad.

Sgraffito involves applying colored layers of plaster or concrete and, while the substance is still wet, cutting away the outer layers to create the image. The crew uses a process called inpainting, replacing the missing paint and leaving the original paint visible, to bring the detail back to the Column.

“We are enhancing without changing,” said Christie, a painter, who has restoration experience with American Indian baskets. She emphasizes that restoration work involves making objects the best they can be without altering them.

Restoring the Column, according to Goodenberger, a historic building consultant, is different from restoring buildings in technique and application, but similar in the thought

process that goes into the work.

“The same care used for restoring a building accurately goes into restoring the Column accurately,” said Goodenberger, who was part of the cleaning crew on the Column six years ago.

Rubens, a local painter, teacher and counselor, is the only local crew member who has actually used inpainting and color matching in a restoration before. But the Column is larger than anything she has worked on and she has less information and photographs to work from.

Limited information is only one dimension of the challenge in the Column restoration. Each person finds their own strengths and weaknesses depending on the capabilities they brought with them to the restoration.

Goodenberger and Rubens joke that getting down the scaffolding before the cookies are gone is the hardest part. On a more serious note they explained that they came to the project with uncertainty and some anxiety.

“The hardest part is the time pressure,” says Rubens who could sit and contemplate one figure for hours. “The key element is time. We are on a definite schedule and that’s a lot of pressure.” So far the restoration is right on schedule with the scaffolding to come down Nov. 1.

For Goodenberger the challenge lies in learning to paint. Of the entire crew, he had the least experience in painting and relies on the more expe-



*Before and after photographs of a drawing on the Column illustrate the effectiveness of restoration.*

rienced artists for advice.

"I had the philosophy, but not the skills," he says, handling a brush now with relative ease. "Looking at the brown walls is like looking at a blank sheet of paper. It's terrifying."

"He's done a great job," added Rubens, noting that the walls are no longer just brown any more.

Christie is challenged by the detail of the design and the permanence of the paint. Sometimes the neck-stretching work to maneuver around the scaffolding is the most difficult physical challenge.

But the artistic quality of the Column decoration outweighs any difficulties the crew encounters. "There's a lot more detail than I thought," said Christie. "It's so beautifully rendered."

And the beauty keeps bringing the crew back. They arrive each morning enthusiastic to begin work. They all agree that the education they have received is one of the best things about working on the Column and look forward to pursuing other

restoration projects.

The local conservators are part of a team effort to restore this landmark to the community. Working with a group this size is new to Christie, Rubens and Goodenberger. "We have to think on a lot of different levels at the same time," said Christie. "It's a lot of consideration."

"One of the real pleasures is having confidence in everybody," said Goodenberger. "I only worry about myself."

When the scaffolding finally comes down, they will step back with other locals to follow the story spiraling up the Column, visible from the ground.

"People are going to be startled to see figures," said Rubens, who fields questions frequently about the progress.

"It is so familiar. The Column has always been here ... people are anxious to see the imagery since it's been so vague," said Christie, who shares that excitement. "It's the focus of town."



# Making a tricky trip

By JENNIFER NARDINI

Jim Virgillo and Ken Yuill have a working relationship of historical proportions. The two Astoria Public Works employees were recently drafted from their regular city duties to do a ‘monumental’ task: taking parts of the top off the Astoria Column and transporting them, bit by bit, down the entire length of the structure.

The two senior utility technicians have been with the city for six years. They have been friends and partners for even longer. They worked side by side at the old Astoria Plywood Mill Corp. for 17 years. “We have a hand-in-hand relationship – we each understand how the other works,” explained Yuill.

The two men have been involved with the Column since mid-summer. When restoration crews raised the scaffolding to begin the exterior painting of the monument, they were surprised by the amount of damage that the weather had done to the viewing area at the very top.

According to Yuill, there were hand rails and lights on the viewing walkway that needed to be taken down and replaced. The viewing tower itself was made of copper ribbing, wood and glass, much of which also needed to be restored or completely redone. Virgillo and Yuill also removed 32 foot-long metal studs that were holding the dome onto the rest of the structure because they were badly corroded. All the work that needed to be

done “was not a part of the original restoration plan,” said Virgillo.

The copper in the dome and the galvanized steel of the hand rail had been leaching out in the wind and rain until “the material was coming down the side of the Column, causing staining and further damage to the paintings,” explained Yuill. Of the overall state of the viewing dome area, Yuill said, “It was all totally rotten.” He added, “it was in pretty bad shape – no doubt about it.”

Frank Preusser, technical advisor and coordinator for the Column restoration explained that his crews knew that there was some weathering at the top of the structure, but not to the extent that they later discovered. “We sort of knew about it in the early stages of planning, but it was not taken seriously enough,” he said.

According to Preusser, the viewing dome and walkway could have remained in it’s semi-precarious condition for another number of years without any major problems occurring. However, he noted, “we had the opportunity and with a \$70,000 scaffolding up, we figured that now was the time to do it.”

Although crews knew the dome area needed repair, nobody knew quite how to get the job done. Enter Virgillo and Yuill, who both have extensive experience as electricians, mechanics and in maintenance. “Our background is very diversified,” explained Virgillo. “We are multi-skilled, and that helped

us to deal with the project.”

Yuill and Virgillo had to rely solely on their technical knowledge in order to tackle the complexity of the repairs, as they had no direction from others on how to proceed. “No one had plans, or designs,” said Yuill. “We just had to pick and choose as we went and go very carefully.” “We were going cold turkey,” added Virgillo, “coming up with our own game plans.”

The two men single-handedly managed to completely dismantle the majority of the viewing dome and walk area. Any tools or other materials they needed had to be carried up all 164 stairs, then back again when they were finished.

The railing was broken down into smaller lengths, and Virgillo, Yuill and two other city workers stationed them-

selves in a ‘block and tackle’ formation down the length of the Column. “The biggest problem was the rail,” noted Yuill. The railing pieces were placed into duffel bags and passed from hand to hand until the entire rail was on the ground. In all, the four men carried a ton of steel down the narrow stairway.

Virgillo and Yuill were a little apprehensive about the project in the beginning. “When we first got the call, I was not real enthusiastic about having to climb up all those stairs many times a day,” said Virgillo.

Much of their work has to be done while standing on the scaffolding on the outside of the Column. “If we would’ve had to do the same thing without the scaffolding there,” said Yuill, “you couldn’t pay me enough to do it!”



KARL MAASDAM

*Dennis Riggs of Thorsness Glass Shop removes one of the glass windows from the top of the Column. City workers Jim Virgillo and Ken Yuill are helping to restore the viewing room, which was not in the original restoration plans.*

# *Now it's time for the finishing touches*



ANDY DOLAN

*David Green polishes the copper finial at the top of the Astoria Column Thursday under a clear blue sky. The top layer of the scaffolding will come down next, and then the glass for the cupola will be put into place.*

As the unveiling date approaches for the Astoria Column, workers are putting the Column's pieces back together after nearly six months of restoration work.

This week the finial – the 4-1/2-foot decorative spire that tops the Column – was installed above the cupola. The finial was made by Washington artist Jack Davis, a copper spinner from Tacoma.

Workers are installing the curved glass sections of the cupola that were removed last spring at the start of restoration. They are also preparing the viewing platform for a new railing – railing that won't actually be installed until after the Nov. 19 unveiling ceremony.

Some other tasks will also wait until later this month. For instance, the footings of the scaffolding prevent the crew from painting all of the acanthus wreath that rings the base of the column.

Scaffolding will stay up for another week or so while the water repellent applied continues to cure. Before it comes down, the U.S. Coast Guard will drape the Column in parachute cloth so that the finished column remains hidden from public view until Nov. 19.



# Column brings back memories

By **RACHEL WECKER**

**O**n a moonlit August night in 1926 Jim Brougher and his now-deceased wife, Helen Ball, drove up to the soon-to-be-completed Astoria Column as friends and drove down from the Column engaged to be married.

That trip began a relationship, lasting almost 60 years to the day, of two lovebirds who had only really known each other for three days at the time of their engagement.

"We met as kids in Gearhart," Jim, 93, begins the story. But neither of them remember the summer that they played together on the beach, except for what Helen's mother told them.

After years apart, the two finally got back together as young adults. Then one night Jim and Helen took a drive to the Column.

"The road was not paved," Jim recalls. The art decoration depicting the coming of the white settler through the arrival of the Great Northern Railroad to the west was complete at that time, but the gardens had not been landscaped and the road was still rough. "It was a gravel road. A temporary service road."

Sitting in his family's navy blue Buick sedan at midnight, Jim and Helen could see down to the Columbia River.

"There was no bridge in those days," says Jim. "It was very romantic."

And then Helen asked the ques-

tion. "She asked me, 'If I wasn't already wearing an engagement ring, would you still ask me to marry you?'"

One month later Jim and Helen were married. They were both 24.

"I took a train to L.A. (where he was living), packed my bags for school, came back and got married. Then I took her to school," recalls Jim. He had found a woman who would be a good preacher's wife, he says. "I thank the Lord who opened the door and we had 60 good years."

They had two sons and two daughters. Helen died a few days before their 60th anniversary.

"We were very happy," he says. "We came every summer and took a ride up to sit in front of the Column in the moonlight . . . That romantic feeling came back every time we went up and we clenched and kissed."

**T**rips to the 125-foot monolith have become a family affair in Brougher households. "The family all thinks the Column is great," says Jim, who leaves the 164 step climb to his 10 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren now.

Jim is happy that the Column will be kept up now that it is being restored.

"The Column has meant much to me," says Jim. "Everything in Astoria has meant much to me."

# *It's a wrap —*

By CATHERINE HAWLEY

**M**other Nature tried to beat Astorians to the punch when the newly restored Astoria Column was unveiled Sunday.

Wind tugged at the parachute-cloth drape over the Column and loosened a top corner, teasing the crowd with a glimpse of the brown-and-tan mural they weren't supposed to see yet.

Astoria Mayor Willis Van Dusen hustled through the last introductions and thank yous of the opening program as the parachute cloth flapped louder behind him.

"Hurry up, let's get going," Van Dusen said, motioning Edith Henningsgaard-Miller, Michael Foster and Jordan Schnitzer to stand with him at a mock T-handled detonator in front of the podium.

The four slowly lowered the handle to the theme from "2001: A Space Odyssey" played by the Astoria High School stage band.

Then a cannon boomed. The drape billowed and dropped part way down the Column before sinking all the way to the ground.



*Former Astoria mayor Edith Henningsgaard-Miller spearheaded the Column restoration project.*

"Beautiful! Oh, it's beautiful!" a couple of people called out as the crowd clapped and cheered. A Coast Guard helicopter rumbled overhead, drowning out the church bells and ship horns sounding in the city below.

Then the people of Astoria stepped forward to get a closer look at the results of a \$700,000, six-month renovation of the city's most prominent landmark. Six cherry trees were cut down to give a clearer view of the column.

Now clearly visible curling around the 125-foot tower is the mural depicting the story of European settlement of the West, as originally painted by Italian artist Attilio Pusterla when the Column was constructed in 1926.

Most people at Sunday's unveiling had never before seen the mural's detail — the rigging of Capt. Robert Gray's ship, a trader's fur cap, the canvas of covered wagons — or been able to read the lettering band that winds beneath the 14 scenes.

Decades of harsh weather and deterioration wore away almost all of the pictures. For years, most visitors to the Column saw only a gray concrete shaft dappled with patches of peeling paint.

Jordan Schnitzer was one visitor who was saddened by that sight.

A Portland businessman who grew up visiting Seaside and then Gearhart, Schnitzer was especially troubled

# *the Column's back*

because the North Coast played a significant part in his family's success story. His grandfather Sam Schnitzer, a Russian immigrant in the early 1900s, began his American life in Astoria by gathering rags to sell to a Portland buyer.

For Jordan Schnitzer, the Astoria Column was a symbol of the hope and possibilities that inspired his grandfather and other immigrants – and this symbol was falling apart.

"It hurt me, as I think it hurt all of you (here) and across the state, to see the state the Column was in," Schnitzer told the crowd Sunday.

Schnitzer joined forces with Edith Henningsgard-Miller, then Astoria's mayor who already was spearheading a group of Astorians

concerned about the local landmark. The Friends of the Astoria Column formally incorporated as a private, nonprofit organization and slowly raised hundreds of thousands of dollars while consulting with conservation experts on how to best to bring the Column back to its original glory.

Most of the artists who worked on the project returned to see the result of their effort. Even though they saw the scenes taking shape while they worked close up on the scaffolding, most of the artists viewed the entire finished Column for the first time along with the people of Astoria. They stood together and tossed confetti into the air at the moment of the unveiling.



*For some who attended the ceremony, the waiting was the hardest part.*

ANDY DOLAN

*It's breathtaking to think there's that kind of talent around that can restore the Column to its original.'*

— Madora Bahr  
commander, Clatsop Post 12  
American Legion



*'I think it's absolutely fabulous. It's a real boost for the community. It will be one more milestone in the forward-looking development of Astoria.'*

— John Wubben  
president, Clatsop  
Community College



*'It's just beautiful. It just gives a different feel to the whole area right here and I would hope that other people, other places would want to see that and come to visit. It's pretty special.'*

— The Rev. John Wecker  
Astoria





